



## Physical Activity

For your heart's sake, get moving! That's good advice for everyone, but particularly for African Americans. Here's why:

- About 27 percent of African-American men and nearly 34 percent of African-American women aren't physically active in their leisure-time.
- Physical inactivity is one big reason why heart disease and stroke hit blacks harder than any other group in America.

If you're physically inactive, overweight or both, you increase your risk of high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, diabetes, heart disease and stroke.

That's a high price for anyone to pay — especially since there is so much you can do to protect yourself. If physical inactivity is a big part of the problem (it is!), the solution is obvious. Get moving. Become physically active. You have the power.

Let's clear up one point early. Being physically active is not about being skinny. It's about adopting a heart-healthy lifestyle — and staying with it.

Getting moving on a regular basis is one of the least-expensive things you can do to reduce your heart disease and stroke risks. All you need is comfortable shoes and clothing and a place to walk or do whatever other regular activity you may choose (more on that later).

Think of it this way. If you had a heart attack, you'd be motivated to exercise to get your life back, wouldn't you? Well, if that's true, why wait? By getting started now, you can reduce your odds of suffering the pain and expense of a heart attack and putting your loved ones through a lot of grief. So get moving and start to enjoy the benefits of physical activity right now!

## Benefits of Physical Activity

Regular physical activity is a key part of heart-healthy living. Combined with healthy eating, at least 30 minutes of physical activity on most or all day of the week can give you many benefits. And if you're trying to maintain or lose weight, you should aim for 60 minutes of physical activity most days of the week. Make sure the children in your life are getting 60 minutes every day, too.

### Cardiovascular Benefits

- Reduces your risk of heart disease by strengthening your heart and blood vessels. Physical activity conditions your heart so that it pumps stronger and less often. It also conditions your blood vessels so they stay flexible.
- Keeps your weight under control. Maintaining a healthy body weight avoids putting extra strain on your heart and reduces your risk of high blood pressure.
- Improves your blood sugar levels and lowers your risk for developing type 2 diabetes.

*Get 30  
minutes  
or more of  
moderate  
physical  
activity on  
most or all  
days.*





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- Improves your blood cholesterol levels by increasing HDL (good) cholesterol. HDL helps keep LDL cholesterol (the bad kind) from building up in artery walls by carrying it to your liver where it is passed out of your body.
- Prevents and manages high blood pressure. This reduces strain on your heart and blood vessels and helps prevent heart attack and stroke.

### Other Benefits

Physical activity doesn't just benefit your cardiovascular system. Here are some other benefits:

- Prevents bone loss
- Boosts your energy level
- Helps manage stress and release tension
- Reduces anxiety and depression and increases enthusiasm and optimism
- Improves your ability to fall asleep quickly and sleep well
- Improves your self-image
- Decreases your risk for breast and colon cancer
- Increases your muscle strength, giving you greater capacity for other physical activities

There's more! If you make physical activity part of your daily life, you can include your family and friends and make it a community-building experience. You can establish good heart-healthy habits in your children and do a lot to head off the conditions that lead to heart disease and stroke later in life.

Physical activity also can help delay or prevent chronic illnesses and diseases that come with aging and can help older people maintain physical agility and quality of life. That's a pretty good payoff!

### Fit in Fitness

*"I don't have time."*

This is the No. 1 excuse we give for not being physically active. If you're like most people, you have a busy life, one that makes it a challenge to find time to fit in fitness. No time? Well, time is all we do have — for ourselves and our loved ones.

Getting moving isn't hard. All you need is to get 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity on most days or — best of all — every day of the week. You might walk, or ride a bicycle, rake leaves, play with the kids — just move! And you don't have to do all 30 minutes at once. You can add up 10- or 15-minute segments throughout the day.

*"I don't have enough money."*

Who said you need a lot of money? You don't need a gym membership, expensive equipment or fancy clothes. All you really need is loose, comfortable clothes and a good pair of shoes. That's a heck of a lot cheaper than hospital bills from heart attack or stroke.

What you need most, you can't buy. That's because the most important thing is the commitment to get fit and stay fit to improve your health and set a good example for your kids.

*Boosts your  
energy level!*





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### On Your Mark...

Be careful and be safe. See your doctor or other healthcare provider if any of these apply to you:

- You have a heart condition or you've had a stroke, and your doctor recommended only medically supervised physical activity.
- During or right after you exercise, you often have pains or pressure in the left or mid-chest area, left neck, shoulder or arm.
- You've developed chest pain or discomfort within the last month.
- You tend to lose consciousness or fall due to dizziness.
- You feel extremely breathless after mild exertion.
- Your doctor recommended you take medicine for your blood pressure, a heart condition or a stroke.
- Your doctor said you have bone, joint or muscle problems that could be made worse by the proposed physical activity.
- You have a medical condition or other physical reason not mentioned here that might need special attention in an exercise program (for example, insulin-dependent diabetes).
- You're middle-aged or older, haven't been physically active, and plan a relatively vigorous exercise program.

If none of these apply to you, you can start on a gradual, sensible program of increased activity tailored to your needs. If you start and feel any of the symptoms listed above, contact your doctor right away. You don't have to exhaust yourself to gain benefits from physical activity; even moderate activities bring benefits.

Heart-healthy nutrition is an important teammate with physical activity. Together, they are a powerful duo in the fight against heart disease and stroke. To learn more, see the Nutrition section.

### Get Set...

The three major types of exercises are aerobic, flexibility and strength.

- Aerobic activities use the large muscles in your arms and legs and give your heart a continuous workout. They increase breathing and blood circulation and strengthen your heart and lungs. Examples of aerobic activities include brisk walking, jogging, dancing, bicycling, skating and swimming.
- Strength exercises build muscle mass and strength. Lifting weights is an example. Strength training should be done 2–3 times per week. Aim to do 8–12 repetitions of lifting with 10–12 of your muscle groups (e.g., bicep curl, leg extension). You can lift free weights, soup cans or even use rubber resistance bands to do your lifting.
- Flexibility exercises increase your body's range of motion. Examples include yoga and calisthenics.

For total fitness, do a variety of activities to increase your aerobic capacity, muscle strength and flexibility. Choose activities that are rhythmic and repetitive, that challenge your circulatory system and can be done at an intensity that's right for you. Make sure the things you do are fun and fit your needs, and that you can do them year-round.

It's best to also consider:

- Your interests (Do you prefer group activities or those you can do by yourself?)

*Encourage your  
children to be  
your exercise  
buddies*





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- Your skills (Build up gradually so you're not sore or discouraged.)
- Your schedule
- Equipment and facilities (court, gym, track, pool, showers, etc.)
- Seasonal variations (changing activities according to the weather)
- Ability to include family or friends (if that's what you want)

You don't have to be an athlete to lower your risk of heart disease and stroke. Moderate activities increase your heart rate but don't cause you to breathe heavily or sweat much. They can be beneficial if you do them on most or all days for at least 30 minutes (and preferably more). Examples of moderate activities are:

- Pleasure walking
- Gardening and yardwork
- Moderate to heavy housework
- Pleasure dancing and home exercise
- Walking from the far end of the parking lot to work
- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator

Vigorous activities raise your heart rate and cause you to breathe heavily and perspire. They can further improve the fitness of your heart and lungs. If you're going to do vigorous activity, start slowly and don't push yourself to the point of exhaustion or injury. If you can't talk while you're active, you're working too hard. As your heart gets stronger, you'll eventually want to increase the intensity.

Here are some suggested vigorous activities:

- Brisk walking, hiking or jogging
- Stair climbing
- Bicycling, swimming or rowing
- Aerobic dancing or cross-country skiing

You may choose others, of course. Just be sure they work for your heart. Whatever activities you choose, make them something you enjoy. Find an

exercise buddy and make it a social event! Working out is a way of life — for a lifetime! Commit yourself to a three-month project to build a healthy habit and see results — then keep going.

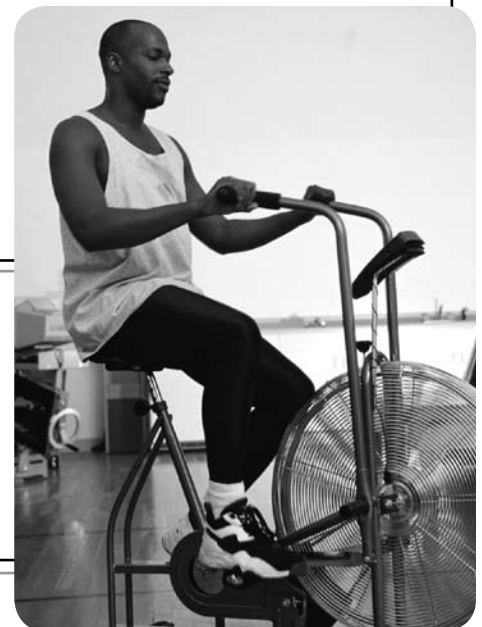
### Go!

Start your exercise session with a warm-up that lasts three to five minutes. Warming up increases your breathing, blood flow and body temperature. It also reduces your risk of injury during more vigorous activities. Start slowly to protect yourself when you warm up, especially if you do stretching or if you go through the motions of your exercises. Keep it smooth and easy; don't bounce.

Next, do your conditioning. Conditioning increases cardiovascular fitness. It should be done at a moderate — not exhausting — intensity. Don't push yourself to a point of collapse. Extend the conditioning period gradually until you're exercising at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.

During the conditioning part of your session, expect to breathe faster and more deeply. Your heart will also beat faster — a signal that you're challenging your system. (That's good!)

*Schedule  
exercise  
like an  
appointment  
during your  
workday.*





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But you shouldn't be out of breath. You should be able to talk as you exercise. And you should recover within a few minutes after exercising. (Read more about this under "In General" below.)

After you exercise, cool down for a few minutes. Don't stand still or lie down. Walk around and stretch any muscles that feel tight or tense.

### In General

- Start by setting specific, easy-to-achieve weekly goals — something like walking for 10 minutes a day and doing 10 stomach crunches in front of the TV at night. Increase your activity slowly until you are accumulating at least 30 minutes of physical activity a day.
- Keep an exercise diary. Write your weekly goal at the top of a piece of notebook paper. Write the days of the week beneath it. Each day record when you exercise and for how long.
- Set target heart rates. This lets you measure your initial fitness level and track your progress. Start with your maximum heart rate: it's 220 minus your age. Then find 50 percent and 75 percent of this number. This 50 to 75 percent range is called your target heart rate. Your goal is to measure your pulse periodically as you exercise and stay within this range. To measure your pulse, lightly hold two fingers on the side of your neck beside your Adam's apple or on the inside of your wrist. Count the number of beats in 10 seconds, then multiply by six to get beats per minute.

When starting an exercise program, this number should be at the lowest part of your target zone (50 percent) during the first few weeks. Gradually build up to the higher part of your target zone (75 percent). After six months or more of regular exercise, you may be able to exercise comfortably at up to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate. But guess what? You don't have to exercise that hard to stay in shape!

Some people can't measure their pulse or don't want to take their pulse when exercising. If that

describes you, try using a "conversational pace" to monitor your efforts during moderate activities like walking. Here's how it works:

**If you can talk and walk at the same time, you aren't working too hard. If you can sing and maintain your level of effort, you're probably not working hard enough. If you get out of breath quickly, you're probably working too hard — especially if you have to stop and catch your breath.**

If you participate in more vigorous activities like brisk walking and jogging, the "conversational pace" approach may not work. In that case, try using the target heart rate. It works for many people, and it's a good way for health professionals to follow your progress.

- Find exercise buddies — at work, in your neighborhood, through your church or some other organization. Encourage your children to be your exercise buddies and help them get in the habit of exercising, too.
- If you go a day without exercising, don't beat yourself up! Get back on track the next day and don't look back.

*After you exercise, cool  
down for a few minutes.*







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### Before and at Work

You can make a couple of slight changes in your routine before your workday starts. Here are a couple of practical ideas:

- Get up 10 minutes earlier and take a walk before you shower.
- Arrive at work 10 minutes earlier and park at the far end of the lot. If taking a bus, get off one stop early and walk the rest of the distance. Walk up the stairs instead of taking the elevator.

Keep the momentum when you get to work. Fit fitness in like this:

- Instead of a 15-minute coffee break, take a 10-minute walk break. Slip on a pair of sneakers and walk the halls.
- Only have 30 minutes for lunch? Eat in 20 and walk for the last 10.
- Take a 10-minute afternoon walk.
- Keep a tennis ball and hand weights at your desk. During phone calls, squeeze the tennis ball to strengthen your grip, or stand and do a series of arm-strengthening exercises with the hand weights.
- Schedule exercise like an appointment during your workday. Honor your exercise appointments as you would any others.

### At Home

Home is where good heart health begins. You can set the example in several ways. For instance:

- Walk your baby to sleep instead of rocking.
- Walk, cycle and run with your child.
- If your child plays sports, walk around the field during the game or jog in place.
- Keep hand weights and stretchy bands near the TV. Do arm and leg strengthening exercises while you watch TV.

- Enjoy physical activity together as a family. Clean the house, work in the garden, wash windows or rake leaves together. Bowl, inline skate, ice skate, ski, bike, hike or walk the dog. The practical possibilities are endless, so be creative!

### Traveling

It's easy to get out of your routine when you travel. Here are some ideas for staying with your plan:

- If you're driving, take an activity break every two to three hours. Take a 10-minute walk in a rest area, jump rope, or do stretching exercises or push-ups on a picnic table.
- Running late? Do some neck rolls or squeeze a tennis ball. At a stoplight, stretch your arms towards the windshield and then across your body.

### Safety Tips

If you live in an area with no sidewalks, exercise in a gym or walk in a mall or on a school track. You may also want to invite a friend to walk with you.

*Take a  
10-minute  
afternoon walk.*





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### Heat and Humidity

Heat and humidity can present their own challenges to your health. Heat stroke — which can be fatal — is a real possibility if you don't protect yourself. Here are some ideas for coping with heat and humidity:

- Exercise during the cooler and/or less-humid parts of the day, such as early morning or early evening after the sun has gone down.
- Gradually build up your exercise until you adapt to the heat.
- Wear light, breathable clothing.
- Drink lots of fluids — particularly water — before, during and after exercising.
- Watch for signs of heat stroke:
  - Feeling dizzy, weak, lightheaded and/or excessively tired;
  - Sweating stops or body temperature becomes dangerously high.

### Cold and Wet

Protect yourself at all times when exercising in cold and wet weather. For instance:

- Wear layers of clothing to trap air between layers and form protective insulation.
- Wear a hat or head scarf.
- Keep your hands and feet warm to avoid losing body heat.
- Walk in a mall or gym.
- Watch for signs of hypothermia. (This is when body temperature falls below normal because the body can't produce enough energy). Hypothermia signs include lack of coordination, mental confusion, slowed reactions, shivering and sleepiness.

### Losing Weight?

If you need to lose weight, you have to burn up more calories than you take in. You'll need to increase your physical activity. Aim for exercising 60 minutes or more every day. But be sensible. Discuss your plan with your doctor and follow his or her advice. A careful plan can head off potential problems.

Eating fewer calories is also important, but don't rely on a fad diet to get you to your goal. Weight that comes off fast often goes back on quickly, too. You need to change your lifestyle. This is the way to lose the weight and keep it off for the rest of your life.

Now, about losing those calories. If you eat 2,000 calories a day to maintain your weight, you'll need to eat less and use up more. Each day eat 250 fewer calories and increase your physical activity to burn up 250 calories more than you normally would. That's 500 fewer calories. At the end of a week, you'd have lost 3,500 calories — or one pound. That might not sound like a lot, but at the end of five months, you'd have lost 20 lbs. Along the way, you'd establish healthy habits that you could maintain. A "crash" diet isn't built on healthy habits.

*Eating  
fewer  
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## Physical Activity

The “rules” for physical activity don’t change whether you’re trying to improve your fitness, lose weight — or both. Remember:

- Find activities that you like and do them for 30 minutes or more on most or all days of the week.
- Don’t overdo it and risk injury; you’re in your plan for the long haul.
- Invite friends or family to join you, if that will help motivate you to follow through.

### Keep It Up!

Once you’re in the groove, don’t stop! An active lifestyle is not a trend for a few days, weeks or months. It’s a way to go at a sensible pace, steadily improve the quality of your life and maybe add some extra years of living. You can do it. You have the power and you’re in charge.

So let’s get moving!

*Improve  
the quality  
of your life!*

